

Trump-era ban that prohibited transgender people from serving in the military. It is clear that LGBTQ Americans can count on the Biden-Harris administration to do everything possible to champion fundamental human rights on their behalf.

The bad news is that while we see progress at a Federal level, the Human Rights Campaign assesses that 2021 is the worst year in terms of State-level anti-LGBTQ legislation in recent history. Governors have signed 17 anti-LGBTQ bills into law, already exceeding the 15 anti-LGBTQ laws passed in 2015, which held the previous record in recent history. There are even more bills waiting Governors' signatures or veto override votes. Most of these bills shamefully target transgender children. These bills and laws are untethered from trends in real public opinion. Recent polling from Gallup finds that support for same-sex marriage is at a new high of 70 percent of all Americans. A PBS/NPR/Marist poll published in April revealed that two-thirds of all Americans oppose legislation to ban transgender student athletes from joining sports teams that match their gender identity, a number that barely changes across partisan lines.

The American people clearly agree with the principle expressed in President Biden's executive order: "All persons should receive equal treatment under the law, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation." It is as simple as that.

When it comes to human rights, civil rights, and being treated with dignity and respect, everybody in this country, regardless of where they live, should receive equal treatment. The House of Representatives passed the Equality Act in February to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in education, employment, housing, credit, Federal jury service, public accommodations, and with regard to receiving Federal financial assistance. These protections build upon and align with the Supreme Court's landmark decision 1 year ago in *Bostock vs. Clayton County*, which affirmed that the sex discrimination prohibition in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also applies to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. That ruling states, "it is impossible to discriminate against a person for being homosexual or transgender without discriminating against that individual based on sex." We still urgently need to pass the Equality Act, however, to apply this interpretation to all areas of civil rights law and to apply protections against discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity to a broader scope of entities. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the legislation and will work to advance it this Congress.

As Harvey Milk said, "It takes no compromise to give people their rights. It takes no money to respect the indi-

vidual. It takes no political deal to give people freedom." This Pride Month, I urge my colleagues in the Senate to join me in supporting the Equality Act to ensure that we protect the human and civil rights all Americans. Our government should do all it can to promote equality, compassion, and empathy—not discrimination, bigotry, and hate.

CONFIRMATION OF KIRAN ARJANDAS AHUJA

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Kiran Ahuja to serve as the Director of the Office of Personnel Management. Mrs. Ahuja is highly qualified and has a deep commitment to public service that will serve her well as the Director of OMB. I am confident that she has the skills to rebuild the civil service and restore protections for civil servants that were rolled back by the Trump administration.

Mrs. Ahuja spent her childhood travelling across the South with her parents as they worked to provide desperately needed mental health services to underserved communities. After graduating from Spelman College and the University of Georgia School of Law, Mrs. Ahuja began her career in public service as a civil rights attorney at the Department of Justice. She went on to lead the White House Initiative for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and then serve as the Chief of Staff for OPM as it responded to a data breach that exposed the personal information of millions of Federal employees and contractors.

Kiran Ahuja will be tasked with leading OPM as it faces a new set of challenges. After 4 years of attacks by the Trump administration on the protections at the core of our merit-based civil service system, OPM needs a leader who understands that Federal workers serve our country, not the individual or political party currently occupying the White House.

OPM is an independent Federal agency tasked with a vital mission: ensuring that the Federal workforce delivers top-notch service to the American people. The next OPM Director must recognize, as President Biden and Mrs. Ahuja do, that union organizing and collective bargaining are in the public interest and that these rights are vital safeguards to protect the merit system principles of the civil service. The next OPM Director must also work to attract new talent to Federal agencies that have lost valuable expertise and modernize OPM's outdated information technology systems. I am confident that Mrs. Ahuja has the skills and knowledge to meet these challenges and to carry out the agency's mission.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO MAL LEARY

• Mr. KING. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a Maine legend who will soon

be leaving his post after nearly a half century of diligent, inquisitive journalism that has kept our State's citizens better informed. At the beginning of July, Mal Leary will sign off for the final time from Maine Public Broadcasting, concluding a 45-year career during which he became one of the most trusted voices in Maine media.

When listeners heard Mal's distinctive Maine rasp come across the airwaves, they knew they were getting the straight news from a model journalist. His integrity and intelligence came through in every story, diving into the policy details in a measured, well-reasoned way that did not betray a bias toward any ideology, political party, or elected officials. Most importantly, every time you finished listening to a Mal story, you knew more about your community and your State than you did just a few moments before.

Mal wasn't only held in high esteem by listeners. I can tell you from personal experience that when Mal is in a room, elected officials notice his presence. He loomed large among the Maine press corps, and his ability to unravel and explain a complicated policy question was only matched by his political instincts. While others, including legislators, were focused on the questions of the day, Mal would look two or three steps down the road to anticipate the pitfalls facing any given proposal. I learned quickly that I always needed to have my facts straight before I talked to Mal Leary.

His innate understanding of both policy and policymakers made Mal's interviews one-of-a-kind. I would often start a conversation with him, expecting to discuss the issues of the day, only to be questioned on an issue that wouldn't come up for another few months or review a legislative hearing from 3 weeks prior. Refusing to be a prisoner of the moment, he always looked at the big picture, and, critically, he made sure that the elected officials he covered did the same.

Maine will be poorer without Mal Leary roaming the State capitol, but he is leaving the Maine press corps in good hands that he had a part in training. A fountain of institutional knowledge, Mal was always generous with his time and his experience, filling in young reporters on the historical context behind long-gestating problems or making sure folks were up to speed on legislative procedures. This next generation of reporters have each grown by absorbing Mal's wisdom, working to compete with him, or a combination of the two, so although he may be leaving for greener pastures, his lessons and influence will remain.

I find a bit of irony in these remarks because even as I attempt to honor Mal, I sense that he will have some discomfort taking the compliment. The definition of a model reporter, Mal wasn't focused on befriending his subjects or accumulating personal accolades; he was always dead set on getting to the truth and bringing that